



The Distinction Between Sense and Nonsense in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

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<p>Tiivistelmä - Referat - Abstract</p> <p>I the present work, I discuss the distinction between sense and nonsense in Wittgenstein's <i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i>, starting out from von Wright's och Emiliani's modala interpretation of the concept of sense that Wittgenstein presents in his book. How is the distinction between sense and nonsense drawn, in the <i>Tractatus</i>, and which are the consequences following from it?</p> <p>The initial question is also discussed against the background of Frege's conception of meaning, and in relation to Geach's och Dummett's views on the doctrine of Saying and Showing in Frege and in Wittgenstein. In addition, I discuss Hacker's explanation concerning metaphysical and logical necessity, and the logical syntax of language, in the <i>Tractatus</i></p> <p>This is followed up by a more detailed presentation of the concepts of bipolarity, the meaningful proposition and logical necessity in the <i>Tractatus</i>, according to von Wright and Emiliani.</p> <p>Finally, I discuss Diamond's view of Anscombe's interpretation of the <i>Tractatus</i>, and the status of the propositions of the <i>Tractatus</i>, in relation to more recent developments of the ongoing debate concerning what nonsense is taken to be.</p> <p>In the present work, I thus consider different aspects of the fundamental question in the <i>Tractatus</i> concerning the connection between language and reality, and what is meant by the distinction between sense and nonsense, in that book. My investigation stresses the central role of the modal concepts in the <i>Tractatus</i>, and discusses some difficulties, resulting from Wittgenstein's narrow concept of sense.</p>			
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<p>Tiivistelmä - Referat - Abstract</p> <p>I föreliggande arbete diskuteras skillnaden mellan mening och nonsens i Wittgensteins <i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophivus</i>, med utgångspunkt i von Wrights och Emilianis modala tolkningar av det meningsbegrepp som presenteras i boken.</p> <p>Frågan diskuteras också med bakgrund i Freges meningsbegrepp, och i anslutning till Geachs och Dummetts syn på vad som kan sägas och vad som endast visar sig, hos Frege respektive Wittgenstein. Vidare diskuteras Hackers förklaring gällande metafysisk och logisk nödvändighet och av språkets inneboende logiska syntax i <i>Tractatus</i></p> <p>Slutligen ingår en mer ingående presentation av begreppen bipolaritet, den meningsfulla satsen och av mening som logisk möjlighet i <i>Tractatus</i> enligt von Wright och Emiliani.</p> <p>Avslutningsvis tar jag upp Diamonds syn på Anscombes tolkning av <i>Tractatus</i> och syn på vilken roll <i>Tractatus</i> egna satser har, med tonvikt på Wittgensteins paradoxala konklusion, enligt vilken hans egna satser är nonsens, för den som förstått honom rätt. Samtidigt hävdar han, inledningsvis, att alla satser i boken är sanna.</p> <p>Mitt arbete tar således upp olika aspekter på den centrala frågeställningen i <i>Tractatus</i> gällande hur språket förbinds med verkligheten, och vad som avses med språkets logiska form. Undersökningen av skillnaden mellan mening och nonsens resulterar i de modala begreppens centrala roll i <i>Tractatus</i>, och tar upp vissa svårigheter som Wittgensteins snäva meningsbegrepp leder till.</p>			
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1 INTRODUCTION

There is a distinction between sense and nonsense, between what we can say and think, and what we only think we can say. In Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the distinction between sense and nonsense is drawn starting out from the meaningful proposition, which expresses a thought. From this follows that there are sentences in language which do not express any thought, but are either necessarily true or necessarily false: tautologies and contradictions. According to Wittgenstein, they do not say anything about reality, but *show* the logical structure of language and reality. Any attempt to *say* what can only be shown results in nonsense.

So the doctrine of saying and showing follows from the definition of sense presented in the *Tractatus*. Contrary to meaningful propositions and senseless propositions, nonsense is only defined negatively – it is, as it were, excluded from Wittgenstein's logical investigation of our language.

In the following, I intend to take a closer look at the theory of meaning presented in the propositions of the *Tractatus*, focusing on the distinction between sense and nonsense. Before going any further in that direction, there is, however, a difficulty ahead of us: on the theory presented, the distinction between sense and nonsense is not expressible in meaningful propositions. In the final propositions of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein declares:

6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

7 What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

Over the years, this puzzling conclusion has led to different and diverging interpretations. In a first generation of readers, Bertrand Russell, in his introduction to the *Tractatus*, protested that:

“...after all, Mr Wittgenstein manages to say a good deal about what cannot be said, thus suggesting to the sceptical reader that possibly there may be some loophole through a hierarchy of languages, or by some other exit.”

Russell’s suggestion, that there might be a solution through the introduction of a hierarchy of languages, may seem appealing from a post-Tarskian perspective.

For the members of the Vienna Circle around 1929, the *Tractatus* presented a criterion of demarcation between logically well-formed sentences in a scientific language and metaphysical statements. On their view, a physicalist reduction initially seemed possible¹. However, the status of the propositions of the *Tractatus* itself remained an open question.

Another early reader, F.P. Ramsey, objected that Wittgenstein tried to whistle what he could not say – in other words, that on Wittgenstein’s theory, the propositions of the book itself were illegitimate nonsense.

In a second generation, including some of Wittgenstein’s pupils, like Elisabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach, as well as other well-known Wittgenstein scholars such as David Pears and Peter Hacker, the propositions of the *Tractatus* are nonsense exactly *because* of Wittgenstein’s doctrine on what cannot be said, but only shows.

According to this approach, Wittgenstein presents us with a metaphysical doctrine, stating that what can, strictly speaking, be said in language is restricted by its logical syntax because of the necessary metaphysical relation between the logical form of language and the logical form of reality. Accordingly, what the propositions of the *Tractatus* try to say about the logical structure of reality is something which only shows in the logical form of language. Nevertheless, Wittgenstein succeeds in *conveying an insight* to his readers about the metaphysical relation between reality and language.

¹ Concerning the difficulties concerning physicalist reductionism, cf Jacob 1996

In opposition to this view, there is a linguistic approach, claiming it must be the logical form of language that determines the logical form of reality, not the other way round. Representing this view, we may mention Brian McGuinness and Erik Stenius.

In more recent years, a much more radical line of interpretation has emerged. On this so-called *resolute reading*, we should take Wittgenstein seriously, and realise that the propositions of the *Tractatus* are sheer nonsense – not illegitimate nonsense, *trying* to say something about the logical form of reality. On this view, foremostly represented by Cora Diamond and James Conant, we should distinguish between the *aim* of Wittgenstein with his book, and what his propositions *seem to say*. Seemingly, the book presents a metaphysical doctrine, but the author's real aim is therapeutical: to liberate the reader from a metaphysical illusion, allowing her to throw away the propositions of the book. (See the section on Diamond below)

These different and diverging interpretations of the puzzling ending of Wittgenstein's book give rise to some further questions: According to the metaphysical view, the logical form of language necessarily mirrors the logical form of reality. But if so, how is it possible to convey an insight about the logical form of language, in propositions violating its logical syntax? And what guarantees that the logical form of language does mirror the logical form of reality? According to McGuinness, it would seem to be a capacity that our brain fortunately has acquired.²

The linguistic interpretation does not resolve the problem, either. As pointed out by Stenius, Wittgenstein does not include a key of interpretation in his semantic theory³. So how do we know that there is a connection between language and reality, at all?

For the resolute reading, the difficulties arise on two different levels: Firstly, the proponents of this view have to show that Wittgenstein does not present a theory of meaning, drawing a line between sense and nonsense, in his book. But if so, on what grounds is the distinction to be made? And if there is no principle for such a distinction, on what grounds should the propositions of the *Tractatus* be completely rejected, and thrown away? Doesn't the distinction

² Brian McGuinness, *Approaches to Wittgenstein*, p. 82

³ Erik Stenius, *Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, p. 132

between sense and nonsense follow, from the theory of meaning presented? And wouldn't it be difficult to imagine that the propositions of the book are complete nonsense? As pointed out by von Wright, they are in some sense "intelligible", after all.

On my view, these difficulties are not of a merely exegetical interest, but rather mirror certain problems related to our understanding of the logic of our language. To claim that the logical syntax of language determines which propositions are meaningful because of a metaphysical correspondence between the logical form of reality and the logical form of language is a metaphysical doctrine, which would require our stepping out of language, out of its logic.

As this hardly seems a very promising way out of the problem, I will suggest a third solution: a modal approach to the *Tractatus*, defining sense as logical possibility. Here, I am foremost going to discuss the view presented by Georg Henrik von Wright. On this view, the meaningful proposition can be true and it can be false – thus, what the proposition says already *shows* its truth-conditions, but what it says is that something is the case.

Accordingly, logic takes care of itself, and does not require any justification: neither in the form of a postulated necessary metaphysical connection between language and reality, nor through a *key of interpretation*, translating sentences in our language into a meta-language, nor in the form of a criterion determined by our ordinary *use* of sentences in our ordinary language.

This also implies, as Wittgenstein shows in the *Tractatus*, that there is no need for a theory of types (TLP 3.331, 3.332) – it is superfluous to present rules defining that it is allowed to say meaningfully that Socrates is a human being.

On the contrary, it is because language already reaches out to reality that a meaningful proposition can be true and can be false, in every thinkable language, including our ordinary everyday one. As stated in the *Tractatus*, the question is not about some abstract questions, but about the most concrete ones – about how we use our language, and simultaneously, about our understanding of it and its inherent logic; about what we can say and what we cannot say, about reality.

2 FREGEAN BACKGROUND

2.1 Frege and Wittgenstein

Before advancing further into the question about the distinction between sense and nonsense in the *Tractatus*, some background is needed. Where earlier interpreters often started out from a comparison between Russell and Wittgenstein, the present discussion, initiated by the New Wittgensteinians, have mainly focused on a comparison between Frege and Wittgenstein.

Both Frege's and Russell's investigations of the logical form of language, i.e., its relation to reality, are fundamental for Wittgenstein's work. In the *Tractatus*, they are the only philosophers mentioned in the Preface and to be criticised in the propositions of the book. Moreover, Wittgenstein already in the Preface declares that the logic of our language has been misunderstood, and that he intends to correct that misconception. One could of course object that Wittgenstein's view of language and its logic isn't directly derivable from Frege's, and that the doctrine of saying and showing in the *Tractatus* above all is a criticism of Russell's theory of Types. Objections on this line to the New Wittgensteinians have been presented by Peter Hacker and Mathieu Marion, among others:

It is evident that the distinction [between saying and showing] emerged in the final section of the 'Notes on Logic' of September 1913 (Appendix I to the Notebooks 1914-1916). It resulted from reflecting on Russell's theory of types, and not, as Diamond and Conant assert without textual support, from reflecting upon Frege's puzzlement about the assertion that the concept horse is (or is not) a concept.⁴

[My reading is] is...also opposed to the more recent American readings of the *Tractatus*, whose sole aim is to show that Wittgenstein did not intend to propose a new theory of logic on the lines of Frege and Russell, but rather to show, in a fundamentally destructive approach, that every attempt of this kind cannot but result in producing nonsense. (That is supposedly the meaning of the final sentences of the *Tractatus*.)⁵

⁴ Hacker 2000 p. 371

⁵ Marion, note 1, p. 21 (my translation)

Although Hacker and Marion are correct concerning the comparison between Russell and Wittgenstein, it may also be fruitful to compare Wittgenstein's conception of the logical form of language in relation to Frege's conception of meaning, and lack of meaning. As Frege and Russell are both mentioned in Wittgenstein's Preface, I think we may safely presume that his criticism does not merely aim at Russell, but also at Frege.

2.2 Frege's Conception of Meaning

The starting point for Frege is in mathematics, or rather, the philosophy of mathematics. Like Russell, he was investigating the logical foundations of mathematics, in order to prove mathematics to be a science. The question asked by Frege in his first philosophical work, *The Foundations of Arithmetics*, concerns the notion of number – what is the number five, for instance? According to Michael Dummett, in *Frege's Philosophy of Language*, this way of questioning eventually leads Frege on to further questions, concerning language and meaning.

Frege distinguishes between the name for a number, and the number itself. For instance, the name '5' and what it stands for, namely the number five. This reasoning also involves him with further questions in philosophy of language and theory of meaning. The answer Frege arrives at in the *Foundations of Arithmetic* is that a number neither consists of the sign printed on the page, nor of our imagination of the number five, but that it is something objective, the number designated by the sign '5'. The Romans designated it by another sign, 'V', which shows that what is meant by the sign is its expressed content or objective meaning.⁶

Likewise, Frege analyses the name of 'the capital of Germany', designating Berlin as its objective meaning. Numbers, as well as concepts, are thus provided with a logical or conceptual analysis, starting out from the distinction between function and argument. Accordingly, the number five, designated by the sign '5', can be further analysed, and shown to consist of the function five times one, $(1+(1(1+(1+(1))))$. In the same way, the expression 'the capital of

⁶ Frege 1967, p. 134

Germany' stands for a function *the capital of* (), which, completed with the argument Germany, yields Berlin as the value of the function. In addition to the distinction between sign and content, Frege later on makes a further distinction, between sense (*Sinn*) and meaning (*Bedeutung*), which is important for Wittgenstein.

Dummett shows the advantage of Frege's analysis to be that it allows for the analysis of expressions with several variables, i.e. that it is possible to provide the meaning and the truth value of expressions which are not analysable in terms of subject and predicate. Thus, general statements and existential ones may be analysed in the same model as single sentences – Dummett argues that Frege's analysis is close to modern second order predicate logic, where the truth conditions of sentences are provided by their logical content, or meaning.⁷

Dummett of course also points out some differences between Frege's analysis and an explicit model theoretical one, but at the same time he claims that Frege's is implicitly model theoretical and accordingly could be used for excluding meaningless sentences from language. We will come back to this point later.

2.3 Sense and Meaning

Frege also makes a distinction between function and argument, as well as a further one between concept and object, which is a special case of the first one. According to him, the distinction between concept and object is grounded in the nature of things.⁸ These distinctions are less important for Wittgenstein.

The reason for making the distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* is epistemological – the question is about what we can know. His argumentation goes as follows: If we say that $a=a$, then what we say is true, and does not add to our knowledge. But if we say that $a=b$, the statement adds to our knowledge. Hence, saying that the Evening star is the Morning star is different from saying that the Morning star is the Morning star.

⁷ Dummett 1973, p. 81-89

⁸ Frege, *op.cit.* p. 178

In both cases, the names stand for the planet Venus, but only in the first case, the sentence provides us with some new knowledge. Therefore, 'a=b' is not reducible to 'a=a', and, hence, an analysis that only has access to the distinction *Bedeutung* is insufficient. What is needed is a further distinction, that between the mode of presentation or sense (*Sinn*), and denotation or meaning (*Bedeutung*). According to Frege, a sentence is the name of a truth-value, the True or the False, determined by the thought expressed.⁹

2.4 Meaning and Lack of Meaning, in Frege

In the following, I'm going to discuss two diverging interpretations concerning meaning and lack of meaning, which are of relevance for the debate concerning the distinction between sense and nonsense in the *Tractatus*.

Michael Dummett takes it that Frege, in his work, presents a theory of meaning which allows for excluding grammatically correctly constructed, but nevertheless meaningless sentences from natural language, as it is possible to show, using Frege's conceptual analysis, that such sentences violate the logical principles of language.

Hans Sluga, in *Gottlob Frege*, presents an alternative interpretation, by taking into account that Frege does not make any distinction between object language and meta-language, *i.e.* between a sentence in language and its truth-conditions, which can only be rendered in a meta-language.¹⁰ Sluga shows that the absence of a distinction between what a sentence says and its meaning poses a problem for Frege, resulting in the construction of meaningless sentences. Hence, it is not possible for Frege to draw a line, in language, between logically correct sentences and meaningless ones – as the distinction can only be made in a meta-language. It is only there that one may meaningfully say something meaningful *about* the distinction between meaning and lack of meaning. On Frege's theory, it is impossible to do so.

⁹ Frege, *op.cit*, pp. 143-163

¹⁰ Gottlob Frege, 1980

According to Dummett, Frege's theory of meaning is not only a theory for the construction of a logically and scientifically correct language, where every sentence is either true or false, but in addition provides a tool for analysing sentences in natural language. On his view, Frege thus replaces traditional grammar with his theory of meaning. Arguing his point, Dummett presents us with the sentence: "Chairman Mao is rare." According to him, the reason why this grammatically correct sentence is meaningless, is that the sentence is incorrectly constructed: the argument, "chairman Mao" cannot be the argument of a second-order function "X is rare", but only of a first-order function, like "x is blue".¹¹

Here, we might present Dummett with two objections: Firstly, one may ask whether one should consider a meaningless sentence to be *grammatically* correct. Secondly, there is Sluga's objection to Dummett. According to Sluga, Frege does not present any theory of meaning about our language, but aims at presenting the logical construction of a thought in a Kantian, epistemological perspective.

According to Sluga, we are concerned with a purely logical distinction, that cannot be meaningfully expressed in language, as long as there is no meta-language. Hence, we cannot talk about meaning in language unless we accept that what we *try to say* is reduced to gibberish. So there is no theory of meaning, in Frege's writings. Instead, we should read Frege in a purely epistemological perspective, starting out from Kant. Here one might object that Sluga does not provide any answer to the question how what we can *know* is related to what we meaningfully can *say*.¹²

Dummett focuses on this aspect, and thinks that Frege reaches an epistemological view, grounded in a logical conception. According to Dummett, Frege managed to establish that the logical structure of language is related to the logical structure of reality. A logically correct sentence expresses a thought denoting an object in reality, and is therefore either true or false.

¹¹ Dummett, *ibidem* p. 51

¹² Sluga, p. 100-107, p.134-144

In natural language, it is possible to construct sentences containing subject and predicate without expressing any thought, whatsoever. But in order to talk meaningfully about sentences with a logical structure and sentences violating the logical principles of language, a model of interpretation is required. Yet, Dummett admits that Frege does not come up with any explicit solution.

Where an analysis in terms of subject and predicate does not allow for the expression of sentences containing more than one variable, Frege's analysis allows for sentences of multiple generality, such as "Every number divisible with the sum of itself plus two" or "A planet which has two moons more than any other planet". As we have already seen, Frege's analysis liberates the meaning of the sentence from its linguistic form, and allows for a logical analysis of the meaning expressed, yielding the truth-value of the sentence depending on its meaning: the meaning of the sentence "The Moon is a satellite to the Earth" is true if and only if the Earth has a satellite and that satellite is the Moon. As pointed out by Dummett, this means that there are ontological implications of the logical structure of language – what we say about reality is true or it is false, *tertium non datur*.¹³

Summing up, Dummett seems to focus on Frege's impact on the development of modern logic and philosophy of language, yet not paying much attention to the fact that Frege's analysis does not clearly distinguish between object language and meta-language. This gives rise to meaningless sentences, such as Frege's own example: "'The concept horse' is not a concept." On the other hand, it is difficult to see in what way Frege's analysis of sentences takes a stand on whether they are *grammatically* correct or not – one would rather get the impression that Frege primarily is interested in questions concerning the meaning and truth-value of sentences. As pointed out by Dummett, Wittgenstein's doctrine of saying and showing solves these Fregean problems. Yet, we are to see how this is done.

¹³ Dummett *op.cit.* p. 8-33

3 SAYING AND SHOWING

3.1 The Metaphysical Interpretation of the *Tractatus*

The starting point for the metaphysical interpretation of the *Tractatus*, in the present work represented by Peter Geach's and Peter Hacker's readings, is the requirement for a *justification* of the connection between language and reality.

According to both Geach and Hacker, the *Tractatus* offers a justification in terms of a metaphysical doctrine, on which the logical form of language necessarily *mirrors* the logical form of reality. From this doctrine follows that the logical syntax of language shows the logical form of reality, and "what *can* be shown, *cannot* be said" (TLP 4.1212). If so, then any attempt to describe the logical form of language necessarily results in transgressing its logical syntax. But that implies that the propositions of the *Tractatus* themselves result in nonsense, an effort to say something that *shows*. Hence, the reader who has understood what the *Tractatus* tries to say *sees* that its propositions, strictly taken, are nonsense.¹⁴

In the following, I will discuss Geach's and Hacker's interpretations, respectively, more in detail. As we shall see, their interpretations diverge on some crucial points.

3.2 The Parallel Between Frege and Wittgenstein

Geach presents an explanation of the distinction between sense and nonsense, starting out from Frege. According to Geach, the apparently paradoxical conclusion of the *Tractatus* is best understood as following from the doctrine of saying and showing. In order to understand why the doctrine, presented by Wittgenstein, cannot be expressed, Geach thinks we had better go back to Frege's writings, where it is already present.

On Frege's analysis, a sentence expresses a thought about something in reality – for instance that the moon is a satellite to the Earth – which either is true or false. A sentence is the complex name consisting of a proper name, in our case 'the moon' and the name of a concept,' () is a

¹⁴ Geach, p. 57-70

satellite to the Earth'. 'The moon' stands for the moon, and '() is a satellite to the Earth' for the concept () is a satellite to the Earth, which, when completed with an object, the moon, is true. We are, accordingly, presented with a sentence expressing a logically structured thought yielding a truth-value.

The differences between the logical categories Frege uses in his analysis are, however, not expressible in logically well-formed sentences. Trying to say that '() is a satellite to the Earth' is a concept only results in meaningless proposition-like constructions.¹⁵

According to Geach, this means that there is, already, a doctrine on saying and showing in Frege. It is impossible to talk about the distinction between logical categories in language in the language itself or any other language. Trying to do so through a hierarchy of languages – talking about meaning in the object language in a meta-language – is excluded, because logically well-formed sentences are limited to sentences expressing thoughts about *reality*.

What Frege tries to say is thus strictly speaking unsayable. But what he *tries to say* is the insight conveyed – that the logical structure of reality *shows* in logically well-formed sentences. Therefore, the logical structure of reality necessarily delimits the logical syntax of language. The sentence 'The moon is a satellite to the Earth' shows the distinction between the logical categories of argument and function, but to talk meaningfully *about* this distinction only results in meaningless sentence- constructions. Yet, the insight into the logical structure of language is conveyed from speaker to hearer, although it cannot be expressed in meaningful sentences. According to Geach, there is a criterion for the insight having been reached: mastering the logic, one is able to produce logically well-formed sentences translatable into a formal logical symbolism, excluding sentences about logical categories. It is possible to show that one masters the logic, but the insight required is, strictly speaking, inexpressible.

According to Geach, the doctrine on saying and showing presented in the *Tractatus* is, however, slightly modified, and, he protests:

¹⁵ Frege, KS p. 169

The Frege-Wittgenstein notion of what comes out but cannot be asserted is almost irresistible, in spite of its paradoxical nature, when we reflect upon logic. Wittgenstein's view is that superficially indicative sentences of ethics, aesthetics, and religion must be assigned the same role as the strictly improper sentences used didactically in logic: the role of conveying insights. The difficulty besetting this further view is that it is a much more obscure question how we can tell in these cases that an insight actually has been conveyed. p.56

As already mentioned above, a sentence for Frege is a complex proper name denoting a truth-value. On Geach's view a proposition, according to the *Tractatus*, isn't a name, but a fact. Hence, a proposition is a linguistic fact. If a proposition *e.g.* stands for the fact that the cup is on the plate, this either is or is not the case. In other words, we have the description of an object standing in a certain relation to another object, but this is not just another fact; it is something showing in what the sentence already *says*. Therefore, Geach concludes that the logical structure of reality shows in the logical syntax of language.¹⁶

In relation to Geach's interpretation, it is motivated to ask whether facts in reality mirror facts in language. We may also ask if it – even in Frege – is the case that the logical structure of reality delimits the logical structure of language, and not the other way round? The crucial point is, however, that Geach does not pay due attention to the modal concepts of logical possibility, logical necessity and logical impossibility, which are necessary for the understanding of the conception of the logic of our language presented in the *Tractatus*. But let us for the present content ourselves with noting the following propositions from the *Tractatus*, which do not seem to agree with the argumentation presented by Geach:

5.5563 In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order. – That utterly simple thing, which we have to formulate here, is not an image of the truth, but the truth itself in its entirety.

(Our problems are not abstract, but perhaps the most concrete that there are.)

¹⁶ Geach p. 64

4.061 It must not be overlooked that a proposition has a sense that is independent of the facts: otherwise one can easily suppose that true and false are relations of equal status between signs and what they signify.

In that case one could say, for example, that ‘p’ signified in the true way what ‘not-p’ signified in the false way, etc.

6.375 Just as the only necessity that exists is *logical* necessity, so too the only impossibility that exists is *logical* impossibility.

What Geach calls Wittgenstein’s broader application of the doctrine of saying and showing from the logical to ”ethical, aesthetical and religious expressions” is on his view, not argued for. As we have seen, Geach thinks it is justified to use meaningless sentences for didactic purposes, conveying the insight necessary for mastering logic. That the necessary insight has been reached may be tested in an exam – but how, Geach wonders, could we prove that someone has reached the insight needed for mastering ethical, aesthetical or religious propositions?¹⁷

The question posed by Geach shows that he has missed some central aspects of the *Tractatus*. Firstly, the distinction between insight and mastery is not mentioned until *Philosophical Investigations*, and is totally irrelevant in Wittgenstein’s earlier work. Secondly, the logical, the ethical and the aesthetical are transcendental, according to the *Tractatus*. (TLP 6.41- 6.421). Hence, the question is not about an epistemic categorizing of different kinds of sentences in language, but about a definition of the meaningful proposition describing reality. According to Wittgenstein, the ethical and the aesthetical belong to ”the transcendental” (TLP 6.421). As we are going to see, Hacker’s position differs from Geach’s, on this point.

The other objections Geach presents against Wittgenstein concern logic. I do not intend to discuss Geach’s criticism of the elementary propositions and simple objects postulated by Wittgenstein, but will instead focus on the question Geach poses concerning why Wittgenstein rejects Frege’s assertion sign, arguing that it is of merely psychological significance and irrele-

¹⁷ Geach p. 70

vant, from a logical point of view. (Tlp 4.442). From Geach's Fregean perspective, Wittgenstein's argument does not seem motivated. Geach points out, reasoning from unasserted premisses surely must differ from arguing from reasoning from asserted premisses? As he points out, there is a difference between, on the one hand, arguments where a true sentence implies the truth of another sentence, and, on the other hand, a dialectical reasoning aiming at showing that an argument leads up to a contradiction.¹⁸ (62-63).

It seems Geach disregards the fact that in reasoning from asserted premisses – a reasoning where the truth of a sentence follows from the truth of another sentence – the assertion sign surely is superfluous.

Another weakness in Geach, to which we shall return later, is his explanation of Frege's conception of logical analysis. According to Frege, a sentence expresses a thought, and may be logically analysed if it is logically correctly structured, which means that it has a truth-value, and thus, meaning (*Bedeutung*). Hence, sentences devoid of meaning lack truth-value. However, this does not imply that a sentence lacking truth-value necessarily is devoid of sense (*Sinn*).¹⁹

Geach is right concerning the parallel between Frege and Wittgenstein concerning what a sentence says and what only shows in what it says – but that does not imply that there would be a *doctrine of saying and showing*, in Frege. This has been pointed out by Michael Dummett:

[T]ake Frege's views about the relation between sense and reference. Sense determines reference, but reference does not determine sense; nevertheless, when we lay down what the reference of some expression is to be, we thereby provide a sense for it. As I remarked in *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, and, as I understand it, Peter Geach has worked out much more in detail, it is difficult to expound this doctrine without inconsistency save by invoking the distinction drawn in the *Tractatus* between *saying and showing*... The distinction between saying

¹⁸ Geach, p. 62-63

¹⁹ Frege, KS p. 143-162

and showing is not only consonant with Frege's ideas, but almost required for a coherent statement of them. Indeed, had Frege had this distinction at his command, a great deal of misunderstanding of his doctrine of sense would surely have been avoided.²⁰

Arguably, there is a difficulty Frege is presented with, which he blames on *language* – not on its *logical structure*, as it were:

Die Sprache befindet sich hier in einer Zwangslage, welche die Abweichung vom Gewöhnlichen rechtfertigt.²¹

Der Verständigung mit dem Leser steht freilich ein eigenartiges Hindernis im Wege, daß nämlich mit einer gewissen sprachlichen Notwendigkeit mein Ausdruck zuweilen, ganz wörtlich genommen, den Gedanken verfehlt, indem ein Gegenstand genannt wird, wo ein Begriff gemeint ist. Ich bin mir völlig bewußt, in solchen Fällen auf ein wohlwollendes Entgegenkommen des Lesers Eingewiesen zu sein, welcher mit einem Körnchen Saltz nicht spart.²²

4 Modality in the *Tractatus*

4.1 Logical Necessity

In a clarifying article by von Wright, he presents two different conceptions of logic: an extensional logic, starting out from truth-functions, and an intensional logic, where the truth-functions result from an analysis in terms of logical possibility and logical necessity.²³

If we consider the conception of language and its logic in the light of this distinction, we will see that his explanation of the logic assumed in the *Tractatus* is intensional. Several of the difficulties following from Hacker's explanation discussed above depend on the conception of

²⁰ Dummett 1991, p. 238

²¹ Frege, KS p. 171

²² Frege, KS p. 177

²³ von Wright 1986, p. 187-200

the logic of our language presented by him, and may easily be avoided if one adopts an intensional conception, where meaning is defined in terms of logical possibility.

According to von Wright, the extensional definition of logic was originally presented by Rudolph Carnap. On this definition, a proposition about a given concept is represented by its extension (class or relation). Later on, this conception has developed into the view that every meaningful sentence is reducible to the truth-function of its elementary sentences, which are truth-functions of themselves.

According to von Wright, one might say that the official *Tractatus* position concerning the meaningful proposition and what it says – the thought expressed – is extensional. On the other hand, what the proposition shows – and what must be passed over in silence – is intensional.²⁴ So far, modality is *shown*.

According to Hacker's presentation of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein's most important result was his explanation of logical necessity, based on his fundamental thought: that the logical constants do not stand for objects, as Frege had presumed.²⁵

Hacker explains the logical syntax of language in terms of necessity, but considers possibility in terms of empirically contingent truth-values – *i.e.* extensionally. He does not seem to pay enough attention to the fact that in the *Tractatus*, necessity is explained in terms of possibility.

According to Hacker's explanation of logical necessity, the propositions of logic consist of tautologies, saying nothing about reality. The truth value of the proposition "it is raining or it is not raining" can be read off the proposition itself. By contrast, the truth value of an empirical proposition like "it is raining" does not depend merely on the proposition, but on how things stand in reality.

Tautologies are *meaningless* (*sinnlos*), because they *do not say* anything. This shows that the propositions of logic are not, as such, to be considered normative, *e.g.* what Frege calls The

²⁴ von Wright *ibidem* p. 186

²⁵ Hacker 1986 p. 42, p. 50

Laws of Thought. Wittgenstein succeeds in showing that there is no need for an independent justification for the inferences in logic – contrary to Frege’s and Russell’s understanding. This, in its turn, means that the idea of constructing a logically ideal language can be rejected – the tautologies *show* the relations of inference between propositions in our language, and in any possible language.

A tautology offers in itself a method for proving that it is a tautology – true on all conditions. (TLP 4.461) Logic consists in inferences in the form of tautologies, and hence the *Tractatus* offers a formal distinction between meaningless propositions, tautologies and contradictions – and meaningful propositions, which have to be compared with reality in order to yield their truth value. A meaningful proposition, according to Hacker, may be true or may be false.²⁶

4.2 Bipolarity

In *Notes on Logic*, Wittgenstein writes:

Every proposition is essentially true-false. Thus a proposition has two poles (corresponding to case of its truth and case of its falsity). We call this the *sense* of the proposition. The meaning of a proposition is the fact which actually corresponds to it. (*Notebook* p.94)

That a proposition has two poles is later in the text called the bipolarity of the proposition. The poles are then ”true” and ”false”. In the *Notebooks*, he puts this point as follows:

Damit ein Satz wahr sein kann, muß es auch falsch sein können. (p.55)

This is a clear statement of the principle in modal terms. This statement evidently impressed von Wright. He expressed it by saying that a meaningful proposition can be true and can be false. Wittgenstein’s way of expressing the point in the quote above is not in modal terms.

²⁶ Hacker 1986 p. 34

However, his use of the hyphen in "true-false" can be interpreted in two ways, either as a disjunction, $p \vee \text{not-}p$, which shows its close connection with the Law of the Excluded Middle, or as a conjunction, in modal terms Mp and $M \text{ not-}p$.

When Wittgenstein speaks of the two poles of the proposition, the poles can be interpreted in both ways, as Mp and as $M \text{ not-}p$. This is favoured by von Wright. The two ways of reading "true-false"

also answer to the following thesis, namely that when you say that a proposition is true or false, this shows both poles, Mp and $M \text{ not-}p$. So the topic of showing is central in the *Tractatus*. There, one central thesis is that modalities can only be shown. In the following, we have taken the liberty to say things which, according to the *Tractatus*, can only be shown.

In fact, Wittgenstein does this himself – "possibility" occurs frequently in his presentation of his ontology, and also in his working out of the picture theory of the proposition.

The bipolarity of the proposition has an important role in his setting up truth-tables of the proposition. There he writes " p (T, F)". Here, again, it is said that p is true or false. But the two poles Mp and $M \text{ not-}p$ show, as we can see.

In writing out the truth-table for a tautology, " p or $\text{not-}p$ (T,T)", we can see that it has only one pole, "true". This shows that a tautology cannot be but true – not true or false, like p . A contradiction cannot be but false. In a late paper of von Wright, "Remarks on Wittgenstein's use of the terms "Sinn" and "unsinnig", "wahr" and "Gedanke" in the *Tractatus*²⁷", he says that logical propositions are "unipolar". Nonsensical propositions, which lack truth-value, are "zeropolar". (p.101-102)

Thus Wittgenstein is able to explain the nature of tautologies and contradictions starting out from the meaningful proposition. Wittgenstein was the first to do so.

²⁷ von Wright 2001, p. 98–106

4.3 Logical Possibility

In order to distinguish sense from nonsense – that is, drawing the line from within, as Wittgenstein has it – a definition of sense is required. For, as stated by Wittgenstein, it is impossible to think the unthinkable, to step out of language and of the world. Hence, starting out from asking what nonsense might be cannot lead very far – how are we supposed to distinguish it from sense, unless we first have a clear idea of the concept of sense presented?

The concept of sense will be discussed in terms of logical possibility – the meaningful or significant proposition, expressing a thought about a possible state of affairs in reality can be true and can be false, and that already shows its truth-conditions

My presentation relies on three claims, concerning the *Tractatus*:

- 1) The implicit logic of the *Tractatus* is modal, and intensional
- 2) The concept of sense is defined as relying on the Principle of Bipolarity
- 3) The connection between language and reality – the logical form they share – depends on an internal relation of immediacy of agreement which is fundamental for the concept of sense central to the *Tractatus*

In addition, we shall see that the doctrine of saying and showing presented by Wittgenstein, which he characterized as his main insight, is not the starting point for the conception of the logic of our language presented, but follows from the definition of sense given in his work. Hence, the inexpressibility thesis concluding it cannot be rightly understood unless one climbs the rungs of the ladder – that is, unless one first gets a grip of the conception of sense that is central to the semantic theory presented in the propositions of the *Tractatus*.

As stated by von Wright, the exclusion of nonsense follows from the definition of meaningful propositions and senseless propositions given; nonsense is only defined negatively, as it were. He also has a point, underlining that the propositions of the book are not incomprehensible, after all!

4.4 Intensionality

In "Modal Logic and the *Tractatus*" a very enlightening article by G.H. von Wright ²⁸, he discusses the concept of sense (*Sinn*), showing that the logic presented in the *Tractatus* has its starting point in the concept of the significant proposition (*sinnvoller Satz*), that is, in the definition of sense (*Sinn*) and that it is given in the context of an intensional view of logic – that is, following the Preface of the *Tractatus*, in the logic of our language.

As pointed out by von Wright, the early readers of the *Tractatus*, among them Carnap and other logical positivists, favoured an extensionalist interpretation of the logic presented in the book, backing up their own reductionist view of meaningful discourse with Wittgenstein's tenet that all significant propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions. Yet, as argued by von Wright:

One could say that Wittgenstein's position is 'extensionalist' only when it comes to what can be *said*, in meaningful propositions. What is 'intensionalist' cannot be spoken of. It may nevertheless *show* itself in language. (p. 186)

Concerning the puzzling conclusion of the book, von Wright states the following:

It is a paradox, often misunderstood and sometimes even stupidly ridiculed, that the *Tractatus*, in the view expressed in the work, is written in strictly meaningless language. (idem)

How are we to understand von Wright's claims? His argumentation starts out from the division into an extensionalist and an intensional view of logic.

An extensionalist conception of logic only takes the extension of the concept presented in the proposition or sentence – that is, its range of truth-values – into account. We might say that the

²⁸ See von Wright. G.H. in *Wittgenstein*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1978 p. 185-200

proposition is reduced to the truth-values of the propositional function presented. Thus, on an extensional view, the proposition is either true or false. This of course applies to tautologies and contradictions as well as to meaningful propositions; where a meaningful proposition is either true or false, a tautology is always true and a contradiction never true (that is, always false).

On an extensional view, one might therefore be tempted to define the meaningful proposition negatively, as a propositional function which is neither always true, nor always false.

If the necessary propositions are tautologies and the impossible propositions are the contradictions, then necessity and impossibility are 'defined' in truth-functional terms. The contingent could then be characterized 'negatively' as that which is neither tautological nor contradictory. (p.188)

But, as pointed out by von Wright, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein does not start out from defining tautologies and contradictions, but from defining the semantic concept of sense (*Sinn*), that is, from the concept of the significant proposition.

An intensional view starts out from the content of the significant proposition; from the thought expressed by the proposition, that is, from the possible state of affairs it describes. What the significant proposition says is that things stand so, that something is the case. But saying so already shows how things would stand, if the thought expressed is true. Thus, the definition of sense is given in terms of logical possibility – the significant proposition *can be* true and it *can be* false – it shows its truth-conditions. In other words, it is the content of the significant proposition, the thought expressed, that shows the truth-conditions of the proposition.

From the definition of the significant proposition follows a definition of tautologies and contradictions in intensional terms: whereas the meaningful proposition says that things stand thus and thereby shows what is the case if it is true, a tautology says nothing about reality, but shows that is necessarily true – that is, true on all conditions, and a contradiction that it is necessarily false – which means that it is true on no conditions. () The definition of tautologies and contradictions thus follows from the definition of the meaningful proposition.

As stated by von Wright, we might thus conclude that for Wittgenstein, what the significant proposition *says* is given in extensional terms, whereas what strictly speaking cannot be said, only *shown*, is intensional. (p. 186)

We cannot say what the picture already depicts, and we cannot say what the proposition already shows – here, we are not concerned with the content of the picture, or what the proposition says is the case, but with the pictorial form that the picture already has; the logical form already manifest in the thought expressed by the significant proposition.

4.121 Propositions cannot represent logical form: it is mirrored in them.

What finds reflection in language, language cannot represent.

What expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot represent by means of language.

Propositions show the logical form of reality.

They display it.

4.1212 What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said.

Before arriving at any final conclusions, there is still some ground to be covered. In order to arrive at a better understanding of the doctrine of saying and showing presented, a further discussion of the principle of bipolarity and the concept of logical possibility is required.

5 EMLIANI ON SENSE

5.1 An Internal Relation

In Wittgenstein's preliminary writings in the *Notes on Logic* and *Notebooks* preceding the *Tractatus*, we find him in search of a way to understand how language and reality connect – how the signs on paper succeed in communicating a situation in reality.

In discussing this, Emiliani has a different approach from that of von Wright. Emiliani asks which the conditions are for truth and falsity in propositions. For Emiliani, the very notions of proposition and sense are central.

His ambition is to explain what is meant by Wittgenstein in

2.18 What any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it – correctly or incorrectly – in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. the form of reality.

In a late paper, G.E.M. Anscombe says that the problems in connection with the logical form of reality is one of the deepest questions in philosophy. (“The Simplicity of the *Tractatus*” p.190)

Emiliani’s task is thus of central importance. As he underlines, for Wittgenstein, a shared logical form in language and reality is a mark of an internal relation between them. This relation is the most important condition for truth or falsity in propositions.

The importance of modality in the *Tractatus* is seen in that Wittgenstein in turn seems to explain logical form in terms of possibility:

2.203 A picture contains the possibility of the situation that it represents.

In his next proposition, he takes this as a condition for truth-value.

2.21A picture agrees with reality or fails to agree; it is correct or incorrect, true or false.

5.2 Immediacy of Agreement and of Disagreement

A similar question is to be found in Frege, who started out from clarifying the relation between the sign for a number, its name, and the number itself, the object that the name stands for.

For Wittgenstein, however, what is at stake is the more fundamental question of how a proposition manages to communicate a situation in reality. How can a proposition about my sister coming to see me really be about *her*, coming to see me?

According to Emiliani, Wittgenstein's theory of meaning in the *Tractatus*, starting out from the proposition endowed with sense, relies on an even more fundamental thesis concerning the immediacy of agreement between language and reality – between the proposition endowed with sense and the possible state of affairs in reality it communicates. As he points out, Wittgenstein presents an argument for this in 4.03:

A proposition communicates a situation to us, and so it must be *essentially* connected with the situation.

And the connexion is precisely that it is its logical picture.

A proposition states something only in so far as it is a picture.

Here, Emiliani underlines that it is not necessary that the relation of agreement holds between the proposition and an actual state of affairs – it is sufficient that it holds between the proposition and the possible state of affairs it describes: What the proposition says *would* be true, if it is in agreement with reality, and otherwise false. Likewise, it follows that the negation of the proposition *would* be true, if what it says disagrees with the possible state of affairs communicated.

Truth and falsity are according to Emiliani external relations between proposition and fact. “Sinn”, on the other hand, is an internal relation between proposition and fact. In the following, I will present an outline of Emiliani's argument concerning this internal relation.

Emiliani points out that Wittgenstein's starting point in his account of ‘Sinn’ is not the “ideal requirements” that a formally correct proposition should meet, but the sense which ordinary propositions already have. (p. 4-5)

Wittgenstein starts out from “everyday language”, as Emiliani says. This is also explicitly stated in the *Tractatus*:

5.5563 In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order. –That utterly simple thing, which we have to formulate here, is not an image of the truth, but the truth itself in its entirety.

(Our problem are not abstract, but perhaps the most concrete that there are.)

According to Emiliani, Wittgenstein's analysis also indicates a "path to metaphysics", for instance in terms of elementary propositions. It seems that Wittgenstein took the idea from Russell's "logical atomism".

Some of the metaphysical doctrines in the *Tractatus* will be discussed later in this text, in connection with Hacker's view on logical form.

For Emiliani, the "crucial move" was made by Wittgenstein *before* setting up a metaphysics. The move is that "the proposition is essentially connected" with fact.

Here, once more, modality is referred to.

Emiliani notes (p.7) that Wittgenstein's use of "agreement" is puzzling, because agreement concerns "both truth and sense". Emiliani explains the difference as follows:

"Sense is agreement and disagreement with possibilities of facts, whereas agreement with actual facts is truth. (p.7). Here, modality is essential. However, Emiliani holds that Wittgenstein's "modal construction" of sense cannot be presupposed in a study of the notion of agreement.

This seems problematic. If so, then the "modal construction" is not that important.

Anyway, Wittgenstein's main insight into sense is this:

"[The] relation of agreement between the proposition and fact is immediate; the fact with which a proposition...would agree is not determined by anything but the proposition itself."

Put in general terms, agreement is only a matter of meaning or sense, i.e. semantic relations. For Emiliani, this means that semantic, or logical relations, cannot be explained in terms of “empirical” relations. Emiliani refers to Wittgenstein’s thesis in *Philosophical Remarks* (p.65) that Experience decides whether a proposition is true or false, but not its sense. “

It is a surprising feature of the *Tractatus* that the *experience* of meaning, e.g. understanding a proposition, plays no part in his account.

Wittgenstein emphasises that language has a “speaker-independent aspect”.

Perhaps it is so that logic, which includes semantic relations, is objective, according to Wittgenstein. Indeed, he says that “logic must take care of itself” (TLP). So logic needs no empirical backing up, it seems.

In a way, Emiliani’s discussion does not take us take us very far. He admits that “agreement” in connection with “Sinn” is not explained, or “defined”, as he says, in terms of anything else (p.23). So seems that “agreement” does not take us beyond the central notion of (logical) possibility, after all.

6 HACKER ON METAPHYSICS

6.1 Illuminating Nonsense

Arriving at Hacker’s explanation of the distinction between what can be said and what can only be shown, some problems arise. Logical necessity, manifest in tautologies and contradictions, is derivable from logically well-formed propositions with sense, which can be true or false. A proposition can be true or false, but it must mirror reality, either as it is or as it is not.

According to Hacker, Wittgenstein’s picture theory is a metaphysical theory which must be separated from the necessary logical syntax presented in the form of tautologies. Hacker therefore holds that Wittgenstein starts out from holding that there must be a necessary correspondence between the logical form of language – its logical syntax – and the logical form of the world – states of affairs in reality.

The doctrine of a necessary connection cannot, however, be expressed in language, because a picture cannot depict itself. Yet, the logical syntax of language must mirror the logical form of reality. Accordingly, the logical form of reality shows in the logical syntax of language – as well in the propositions of logic, which are necessarily true or necessarily false, as in well-formed contingent propositions which can be true or false. The latter are hence possibly true or possibly false, provided they do not violate the logical syntax of language.²⁹

Nonsense is the result of transgressing the limits of sense – nonsense, such as the pseudo-propositions of mathematics or the a priori propositions of philosophy, do not “say” anything. Accordingly, the propositions of the *Tractatus* themselves are also nonsense – an attempt to say what can only be shown in logically well-formed propositions.

Here, Hacker protests that Wittgenstein ought to have made a clear distinction between misleading nonsense – metaphysical propositions – and illuminating nonsense – the propositions of the *Tractatus* itself, which convey an inexpressible insight to the reader who sees the difference between that which can be said and that which only shows.³⁰

6.2 Truth-conditions

If you say that p , then that is true, if p . This is in fact Aristotle’s view. It was taken over by Wittgenstein (and also by Tarski). Now, since a description is a description of a fact, it is natural to hold, like Wittgenstein does, that the criterion of truth lies in the fact.

In the *Tractatus*, the concept of truth-conditions is central. The term was introduced by Frege, for complex propositions. In the *Tractatus*, it is used also in the singular: “To understand a proposition is to know its truth-condition....” This is the basis of “truth-conditional semantics”, as it is called.

²⁹ Hacker 1986 p. 50-51

³⁰ Hacker 1986, p. 25-26

Hacker goes wrong when he denies that Wittgenstein offers a “truth-conditional theory of meaning”³¹ For Hacker, molecular propositions have truth-conditions, but “an elementary proposition has no truth-conditions”. Of course it has not, but it does have a truth-condition, in the singular: ‘p’ is true, iff p. This formula applies to any proposition (whichever the complexity of ‘p’).

Suppose that ‘p’ is a simple (non-molecular) proposition. It is made true by *p*, only because it says that *p*.

This is why Wittgenstein calls a (meaningful) proposition a picture. The proposition ‘p’ is a picture of the fact that p, if true. The central role of modality in the *Tractatus* emerges in Wittgenstein’s account of what ‘p’ is a picture of, when ‘p’ is false. It is, in the end, a picture of a possible state of affairs. The remark is commented on later by Wittgenstein, in *Philosophical Investigations*:

A proposition can do no more than a picture. It cannot set up (hinstellen) what is not the case. (§ 520)

Hacker goes wrong in saying that “it is incorrect that one can isolate a logical core of the picture theory of meaning that is independent of logical atomism.”³² However, since ordinary propositions can be seen as pictures (as emphasised by Stenius, Hintikka, the ‘logical core’ is certainly independent of “logical atomism”).³³

The logical core of the proposition when seen as a *picture* is no other than the logical core of the “sinnvoller Satz”, namely its bipolarity. That is logic, although of the modal variety.

³¹ Hacker 1986, p. 61. In the first edition (1972), he accepts it.

³² Hacker 1986, p.61

³³ See Stenius 1964, Hintikka 1996

As the “isomorphism” between language and reality emphasized first by Stenius³⁴, Hacker goes wrong in holding that ‘isomorphism’ explains how “the possibility of propositions being false but meaningful is explained”.

However, you cannot ‘explain’ the meaningfulness of a false proposition like: “Vienna is the capital of France” by noting an ‘isomorphism’, because that *fact* is simply not there. So you have to say, if you insist on “isomorphism”, that ‘p’, when false, is a picture of a possible fact. Yet, that possible fact is given by the meaningful proposition *only*, so no isomorphic correspondence can be established.

6.3 The metaphysics of logical form

For Hacker, the logical form of reality determines the logical form of language. It is reflected in our propositions. This view is controversial. It is the target of the “New Wittgensteinians” attack on Hacker.³⁵

As we shall see, the state of affairs need not be an actual state of affairs; what’s important is the relation between the proposition and the state of affairs that would make it true.

Pace Emiliani, for Hacker, the correlation between names and objects – the logical syntax of language and the logical combination of objects in reality – is separated from the logical form of the proposition, its truth-conditions. Thus, as Emiliani rightly observes, Hacker cannot offer any argument for his claim that there is a metaphysical relation of formal correspondence between the proposition and the state of affairs described. On the contrary, from Hacker’s position one might conclude that the necessary coincidence between the possibilities of combination of names in language and of objects in reality does not hold. Here, Emiliani’s criticism relies on the observation that in case the correlation between names and objects is independent of the formal context in which the names occur, that is, of the meaningful proposition, then the

³⁴ Stenius, chapter X

³⁵ See for instance Diamond, Conant in *The New Wittgenstein*, 2000

speaker could mean the names in such a way that the corresponding state of affairs would be impossible.

For instance, the combination of names in language “Russell sleeps Frege” could, on Hacker’s interpretation, form a proposition violating the logical syntax of language, and thus stand for a metaphysically impossible combination of objects in reality.

Yet, as argued by Emiliani, such a proposition has no sense. According to the *Tractatus*, (5.4733), if the proposition has no sense, it can only be because we have failed to give a meaning to some of its constituents.

Secondly, Emiliani points out that Hacker’s argumentation for interpreting Wittgenstein as depending on ostension for the relation of language mirroring reality is quite weak. Holding that the proposition is linked to reality by means of ostensive definition is neglecting the many instances in the *Tractatus* where Wittgenstein draws our attention to the relation of immediacy of agreement. Emiliani concedes that ostensive definitions might be appealed to as a way for solving the problem of connection later on, in the Blue Book and the Brown Book, but that is not relevant at present.

Thirdly, Emiliani does not think Hacker’s line of argumentation holds, because a proposition is not related to reality in the same way as a name is. (TLP 3.144). Propositional constituents (names) are not assigned meaning through independent acts of ostensive definition; Wittgenstein’s use of elucidations rather show that the references of names are only determined within their use in the context of a proposition.

McGuinness writes:

[T]eaching can be carried out only by means of complete propositions or complete thoughts. The learner has to grasp these as a whole, and, when he has done that, he will have an understanding of the primitive signs contained in the proposition.³⁶ As Emiliani concludes, in agreement with McGuinness: “The reference is not attached to a name independently of its occurrence in a proposition – it is neither prior to sense nor independent of it.”

Emiliani holds that a proposition consists of a combination of names which stand for objects, but the name-object relation is not prior to the sense expressed. The connection between language and reality is a relation of agreement-disagreement, which involves the proposition as a whole. In other words, meaning is not established as it were bit by bit; the connection between name and object is given in the context of the proposition.

We do not have names, denoting objects, which would somehow in addition would be endowed with possibilities of combination (a name is not a name *plus* a form): that a name has such and such a form is integral to its being such and such a name. Stenius points out that a propositional constituent only designates in its logico-syntactical form (cf Stenius p. 192 and Tlp 5.4733).

Language thus mirrors the logical form of reality. A name cannot designate an object, unless they share the same combinatorial possibilities – forms. An object is given in its possibilities of combination – it is unthinkable apart from its form (2.011, 2.021, cf p. 140 ff). “Is red” only occurs in a meaningful proposition as a predicate with an argument-place, and this shows that only so, as a property that applies to an argument, can redness occur in a state of affairs.

According to Emiliani, the theory of meaning in the *Tractatus*, which starts out from the meaningful proposition, relies on an underlying, internal relation of agreement between language and reality – between the meaningful proposition and the state of affairs in reality it describes. As argued by Emiliani, this underlying relation consists in the immediacy of agreement between the proposition and the state of affairs described: saying that the triangle is red already shows the state of affairs that it *would* agree with, namely that the triangle *is* red.

³⁶ McGuinness, p. 70

7 DIAMOND ON NONSENSE

7.1 General Approach

Diamond has recently republished five critical essays on Anscombe's views on the *Tractatus*. The essays in the book, *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe* ³⁷ are preceded by lengthy introductions. These are of special interest, as the author in them comments on her own criticisms of Anscombe, and explains what her own "resolute reading" of the *Tractatus* (also developed by James Conant) is up to. Diamond wishes to stress that this reading does not mean that *any* proposition which fails to be a description of a possible state of affairs, i.e., which fails to be "bipolar", or fails to be a "logical" proposition, is nonsense.

That is not the doctrine of the *Tractatus*, nor is that her view of that doctrine. However, it *might* be the view put forward by Anscombe. This is discussed at length.

There are very few direct quotes from Anscombe's book *Introduction to the Tractatus*. Instead, Diamond discusses two sentences used by Anscombe, as examples of propositions which are "just true", although they are not tautologies: "Red is a color" and "'Someone' is not the name of someone". Anscombe takes these propositions to be *objections* to Wittgenstein's assumed view that if a proposition which is not a tautology is true, it must be bipolar. Diamond gives credit to Anscombe for this insight, and discusses these two kinds of true propositions on several occasions in her book. However, her citations are in general not primarily meant to back up a "resolute reading". She writes:

This is not a volume about "the resolute reading" of the *Tractatus*, although the issues that are connected with that reading do come up, especially in the discussions of "Red is a color"...My disagreement with Anscombe about statements of that sort reflects a resolute reading of Wittgenstein on nonsense. One relatively minor change in my views about such issues is that I think the image of the "frame" of the *Tractatus* turned out to be unhelpful. (p. 5)

³⁷ Diamond, *Reading Wittgenstein with Anscombe*, 2019

In fact, Diamond proceeds like any other, not resolute reader of the *Tractatus*. Wittgenstein's remarks are taken as theses. Whether they are "nonsensical" in the end, is not discussed. This might surprise some of her readers. However, Diamond sees no problem, here.

[Wittgenstein] says at the end that the remarks in the book are meant to be thrown away, but they are meant to lead you to see how to engage in an activity. If the activity that you have been led to is helpful, it needs no further justification; it's just as good after you throw away the remarks that led you to engage in it as it was before you threw them away. I believe that the chunk of the *Tractatus* that follows TLP 3.3 is meant to be particularly helpful in enabling the reader to see how to engage in the activity of philosophy as Wittgenstein conceived it. The remarks can indeed be thrown away, but the reader can go on with the activity. (p. 27)

Diamond's doctrine, it seems, is that Wittgenstein's remarks (*Sätze*), only have a heuristic value, and may be disposed after use. Yet, the "activity" of the reading is to remain. For Diamond, philosophy is an activity of clarification, and as such, apparently not conclusive. Therefore, no theses or doctrines in logic or metaphysics are needed. So, we might consider the *Tractatus* some kind of manual, only? (Cf p. 119)

This would certainly be a non-standard reading of the book. After all, Wittgenstein says, in the Preface, that "the truth of the thoughts communicated here seem to me unassailable and definitive". It is unlikely that he meant that the only truth in the book is that his propositions are nonsensical.

Indeed, this is not Diamond's doctrine, either, though her way of expressing it is somewhat obscure:

The justification of what we do in philosophical clarification lies in its helpfulness, not in anything in the *Tractatus*. (p. 28)

So the "criticism" stands, though that is not the "important thing in the arguments presented. And also, Diamond refers to many remarks in the *Tractatus*, especially those which discuss the "context principle", and she treats them as true, or at least "right".

7.2 Pictures

In her book, Anscombe gives a famous list of propositions which evidently are meaningful (p.79):

- Laws of inference
- Logical classifications, e.g. “to the right of” is a relation
- Modal statements
- Propositions stating probabilities
- Propositions of mathematics
- Laws of nature
- Propositions about space and time
- Propositions about the world as a whole, about God and about the meaning of life.

For Anscombe, the problem is that Wittgenstein does not account for how these propositions have meaning, or eventually, truth-conditions. For her, that Wittgenstein’s “sinnvolle Sätze” and “logical propositions” are the only ones that merit attraction is too narrow, in that it “excludes” perfectly meaningful propositions from *the realm of sense*. For Anscombe, Wittgenstein’s view of sense is too restrained, since it suggests that some, in fact meaningful, propositions are *nonsense*.

However, Diamond holds that there is no need to “fit in” (*per impossibile*) these propositions, which make *some sense* – the propositions of the *Tractatus* itself, among the meaningful ones.

For Diamond, Wittgenstein’s theory excludes *nothing*. It is no more than an account of obviously bipolar propositions and obviously logical propositions. The rest of the propositions in the list – except for the propositions of the *Tractatus* itself – are meaningful in their own way. Even if Wittgenstein calls many of them “pseudo-propositions”, that is not to be taken as a dismissal. In this, Diamond is surely right. Wittgenstein certainly did not dismiss mathematics, or natural science. Diamond says:

[M]y disagreement with Anscombe involves the contrast between reading the *Tractatus* as a guide to philosophical activity and reading it as the setting out of a complex and powerful theory. (p. 32)

Elsewhere, Diamond calls this “powerful theory” a metaphysical theory adopted by readers like Pears, Hacker and Malcolm. For them, the propositions of the *Tractatus* try to say something which cannot be said, but “shows”. Yet, these sentences are in some sense “intelligible”, as von Wright puts it.³⁸

In this, von Wright is of course right. This must also be Diamond’s view (p. 95), since she quotes many of these problematic propositions with relish, especially the context principle.

7.3 “Showing”

In Anscombe’s view, in the *Tractatus*, the notion of “showing” is important:

But an important part is played in the *Tractatus* by the things which, though they cannot be ‘said’, are yet ‘shewn’ or ‘displayed’. That is to say: it would be right to call them ‘true’, since they cannot be said,; in fact they cannot be called true, since they cannot be said, but ‘can be shewn’ or ‘are exhibited’, in the propositions saying the various things that can be said. (p. 162)

Diamond has been criticized for not seeing its importance. Her defense is the following:

People who give a “resolute” reading of the *Tractatus* are sometimes said to wind up completely *junking* what Wittgenstein says about saying and showing. I’ve argued (with James Conant) that what needs to be junked is *one way of understanding* Wittgenstein’s remarks about *showing*. The point of the argument is that you can junk *that* understanding, (that is, junk the idea of what can be said as a kind of quasipropositional content) without dropping the idea that what Wittgenstein says about showing is helpful – and there are various ways in which this might be done. (p. 35f)

So Wittgenstein’s view that “language shows the logical form of reality” (TLP 2.18) is still “helpful”, though we do not need the notion – it is “showing” for realizing this.

³⁸ See above, p. 36

Diamond objects to “showing” in that it, as Anscombe says, that it shows a “content” which, as Diamond puts it, is “quasi-propositional”, i.e. “it is close enough to propositionality for us to judge what sort of proposition it would be, if it were a proposition at all.” (p. 165)

7.4 “Behelfe der Darstellung”

In the article “³⁹What Can Only Be True”?, which is not closely related to Anscombe’s view, Diamond sets out to *rescue* all Scheinsätze of the *Tractatus* in Anscombes list, except for the propositions of the *Tractatus* itself, by claiming that they are “Behelfe der Darstellung”. Diamond writes:

An expression constructed by putting an equal sign between two signs means that either of the flanking signs can be substituted for the other; and Wittgenstein speaks of such expressions as *Behelfe der Darstellung*: aids to representation (TLP 4.242). (p. 175f)

Yet, she forgets that the propositions of the *Tractatus* itself are certainly not “Behelfe der Darstellung”. Still, they have a function in helping us to get on with the “clarification” when we are in trouble. How “the world is my world”, say, could do that is not explained. So the resolute reading is just a programme, which in no way explains how the *Tractatus* propositions could be nonsensical, though intelligible and true. However, Diamond does not mention *this* passage in the Preface to the *Tractatus*.

Now, the metaphysical propositions of the *Tractatus* are meant to give the essence of the world – no small thing. But then they are necessary truths. However, this is not a topic in the *Tractatus*, Diamond writes:

[It] is useful to think of the *Tractatus* not so much as having a stance of “modality”, as disrupting the idea of modality as a topic. The *Tractatus* is concerned (on the one hand) with tautologies, contradictions, and such asymmetric propositions as equations and (on the other hand)

³⁹ Diamond, *op. cit.*, p. 171-201

with various kinds of confusion that are involved in making some or other proposition to express, or to be trying to express, or intended to express, something that is necessarily the case. (p. 201)

This means that Diamond is not prepared to discuss one obvious weakness in the *Tractatus*, namely that logical necessity is the only kind of necessity accepted.

Later Wittgenstein admitted that “grammatical propositions” have a kind of necessity (“sensations are private”).

7.5 Grammatical Propositions

That many of the propositions of the *Tractatus* could be “grammatical” is not maintained by Diamond. The topic has been exploited by Moyal-Sherrock in a paper from 2007, “The Good Sense of Nonsense”: a reading of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* as non-selfrepudiation. (Philosophy 82, 2007). (Diamond does not refer to that paper.)

Instead, the two sentences from Anscombe are discussed, by Diamond: “Red is a colour”, “‘Someone’ is not the name of someone” qualify quite easily as “grammatical” as hold in PI. For Moyal-Sherrock, Wittgenstein is saying, in 6.54, that his *Sätze* are ‘unsinnige’ does not mean this in a “pejorative” sense. His use of nonsense is just “discriminatory” (p. 147). Moyal-Sherrock means that the *Sätze* are nonsense only because *they lack sense*. In her own words:

[N]onsense can also be what demarcates sense and is therefore not itself endowed with sense. This last way for something to be nonsense has been neglected by Wittgensteinians generally, even if (as we shall see) Wittgenstein time and again insists on it. In the light of Wittgenstein’s later explicit references to grammar as nonsense, I take Tractarian sentences to be expressions to be precursors of rules of rules of grammar. Not part of the language-game, not endowed with sense, but demarcating it, Tractarian sentences form a ladder from which to make sense – a ladder which is neither metaphysical, nor ill-formed, but grammatically elucidatory. I then dissolve the paradoxical ineffability claim by making a technical distinction, based on Wittgenstein’s own theory and practice, between *saying* and *speaking*. Inasmuch as sayability is internally linked to sense in the *Tractatus*, it is the grammatical, *and therefore non-sensical*, nature of Tractarian sentences that make them technically unsayable. But that Tractarian sentences

cannot technically be said does not mean they cannot be *spoken*. Once we make this technical distinction between *saying* and *speaking*, the author of the *Tractatus*, can no longer be taxed with inconsistency in articulating the unsayable. p.148

So a *Satz* like “The world is everything that is the case” (TLP 1) does not *say* anything, but it can be “spoken”, in the way grammatical rules can be “spoken”.’

But if this is all that “unsinnig” means, then Wittgenstein could have called this *Satz sinnlos* (senseless), only. Wittgenstein in fact accepted that translation by Ogden. If so, then the *Sätze* have the same status as tautologies, which are true and senseless.

Moylat-Sherrock backs up her interpretation by quoting the *Philosophical Grammar*:

What belongs to grammar are all the conditions...necessary for comparing the proposition with reality. That is, all the conditions necessary for...understanding.” (PG p. 88)

So, for Moylat-Sherrock, the *Sätze* expose such “conditions”. They have the form of rules, i.e. grammatical rules.

Be that as it may, it is difficult to see the *Tractatus* as a book on “grammar”. It looks more like a treatise on *logic*.

7.6 Lugg on Tautologies

In a fairly recent paper by Andrew Lugg, “Wittgenstein’s True Thoughts”⁴⁰, he comes up with a reading very much like Moylat-Sherrock’s. Lugg prefers to call the *Sätze* of the book tautologies, in a general sense, that is, he considers them trivially true. Lugg relies on Dreben’s and Floyd’s work.⁴¹

⁴⁰ NWR 2, 2013, p. 33-56

⁴¹ Lugg refers to “Tautology; How to Use a Word” in *Synthese* 87 (1), p. 23-49

Lugg's contribution is mainly that the *Sätze* – in so far as they have a metaphysical impact – are not asserted in the way propositions proper are. They “show without saying” Lugg writes:

In his view propositions in the *Tractatus* sense are assertible as well as expressible, tautologies merely expressible. (p. 50)

What Wittgenstein means is that “his thoughts [are] to be read as *sinnlos* when unasserted (and as *unsinnig* only when asserted). (p. 51)

Lugg is right in that tautologies cannot be asserted, according to the *Tractatus*. Yet, they are true. So by considering, say, the proposition “Logic is transcendental” as a tautology, Lugg can, ingeniously, consider it as true, when unasserted, and as nonsense, if asserted. Thus, he resolves the paradox in 6.54.

However, it is difficult to consider *any* statement as unasserted. “Logic is transcendental” looks very much like an assertion. So it is difficult to believe in Lugg's solution.

7.7 Necessary Truth

It is obvious that Wittgenstein gets himself in trouble by calling his *Sätze* both true and non-sensical. The doctrine may well be a simple consequence of his too narrow conception of necessary truth. For him, the only necessity is logical necessity (TLP 6.37). Necessity which can be expressed by the truth-table method. This view cannot be used for his *Sätze*. “The world is everything that is the case” is , if true, necessarily true. Yet, the truth-table method is of no avail in explaining that.

So Wittgenstein uses a notion of necessity for which there is no explanation in his book. That does not mean that the *Sätze* are nonsense. It only means that the book is incomplete. In this, he unfortunately follows Hume and Leibniz, who also were unable to justify their dichotomy between the logical and the factual, so they were unable to explain their own practice.

Kant had an explanation, the *synthetic a priori*. For some reason, this was not an option, for Wittgenstein.⁴²

To conclude: According to Alberto Emiliani, the theory of meaning presented in the *Tractatus*, starting out from the meaningful proposition, relies on an underlying, more fundamental internal relation of agreement and disagreement between language and reality – between the proposition endowed with sense, and the state of affairs it describes, correctly or incorrectly. As argued by Emiliani, the underlying fundamental relation consists in the immediacy of agreement between the proposition and the state of affairs depicted: saying that the triangle is red, already shows the state of affairs that would agree with it, namely that the triangle *is* red.

However, it still seems that the notion of “possibility” is the fundamental notion in the *Tractatus*. Logical form, agreement, sense are explained in the *Tractatus* by reference to that modal notion.

⁴² See also A. Coffa, The semantic tradition from Kant to Carnap

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Abbreviations used:

TLP = Tractatus Logici-Philosophicus

PI = Philosophical Investigations

PG = Philosophical Grammar

FA = The Foundations of Arithmetic

KS = Kleine Schriften

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